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(54) **METHOD AND UNIT FOR MAKING SECTIONS OF PADDING FOR ABSORBENT SANITARY ARTICLES**

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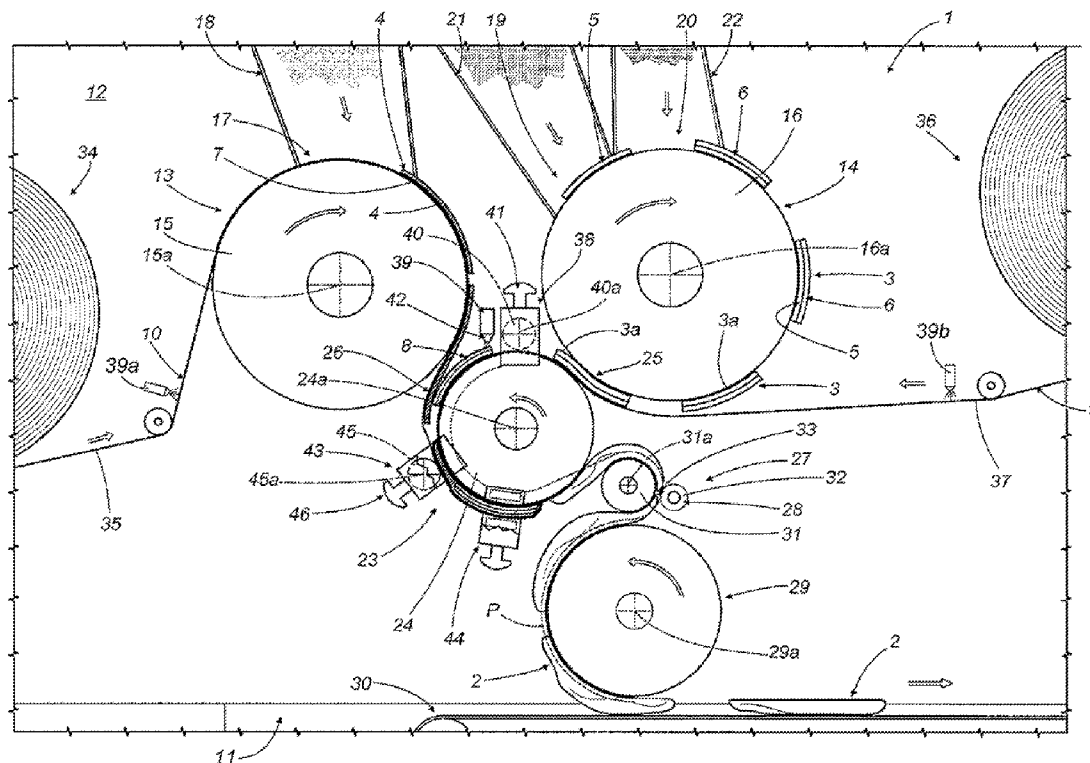
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

In a unit for making sections of padding for absorbent sanitary articles comprising a first rotary conveyor for feeding and forming a continuous succession of outer pads, comprising at least one layer, a second rotary conveyor for feeding and forming a continuous succession of inner pads comprising two layers, a third rotary conveyor for the pads defining a position for superposing the outer pads and the inner pads, there are compressing means for the two-layer inner pads upstream of the superposing position and second compressing means for the superposed pads downstream of the superposing position.



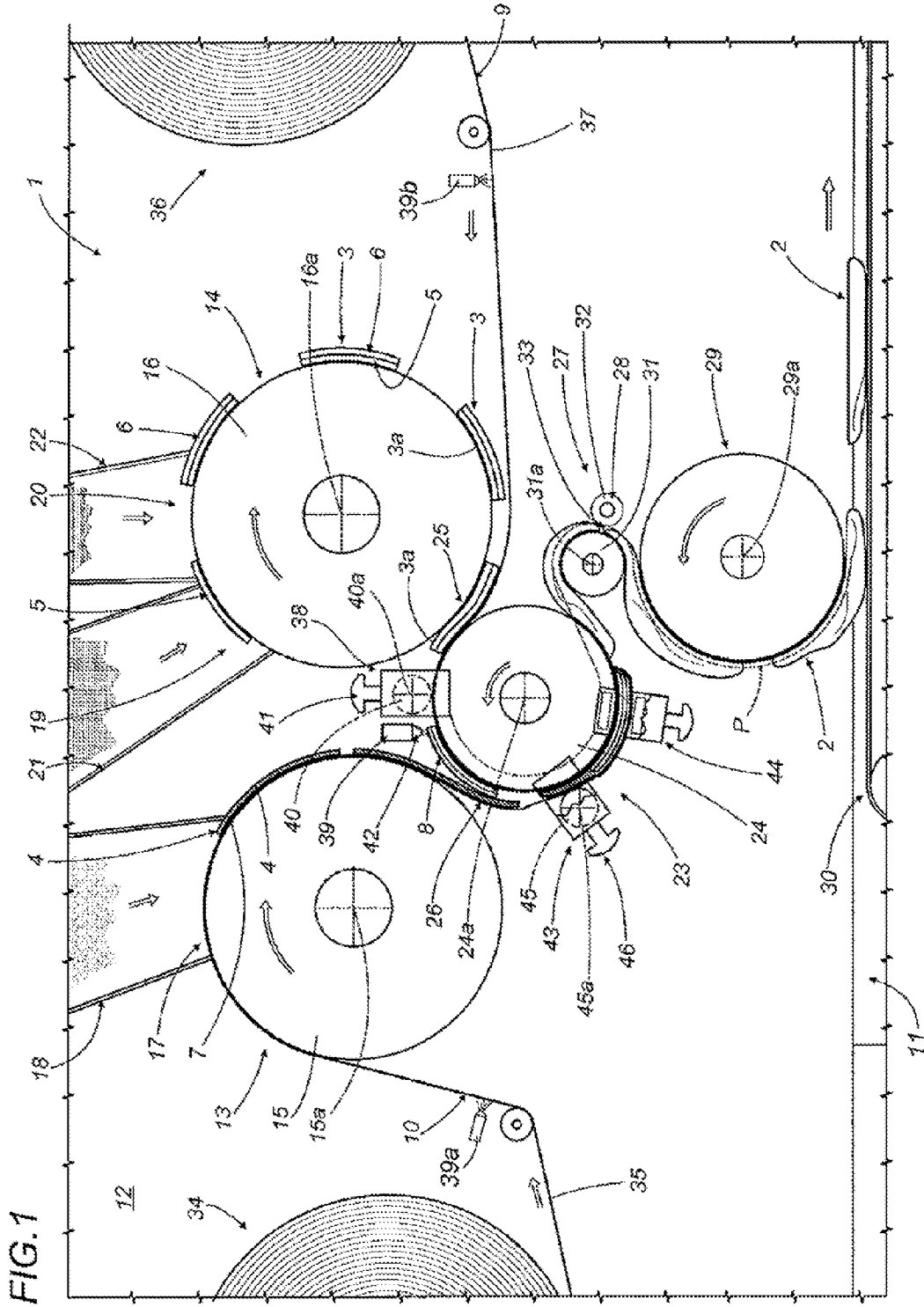


FIG.2

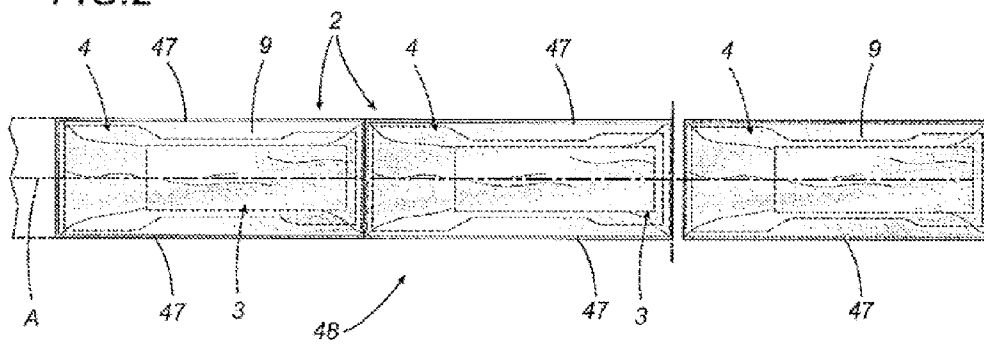


FIG.3

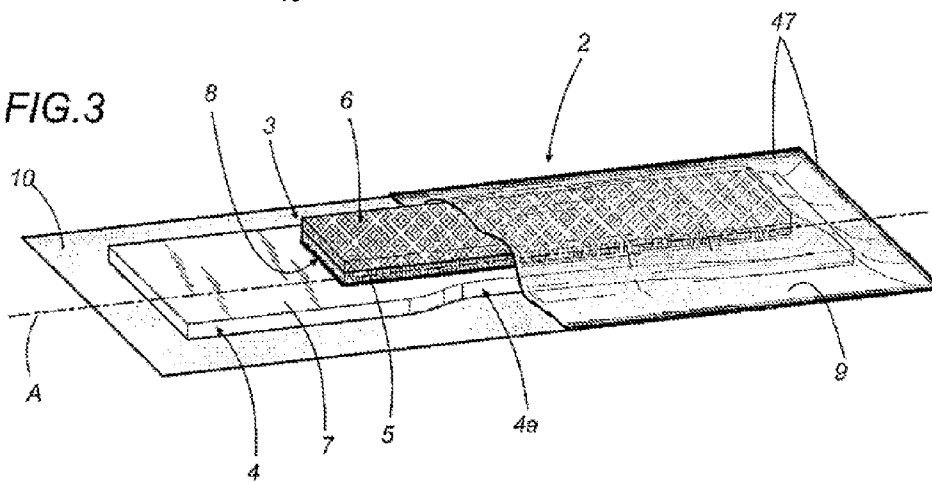
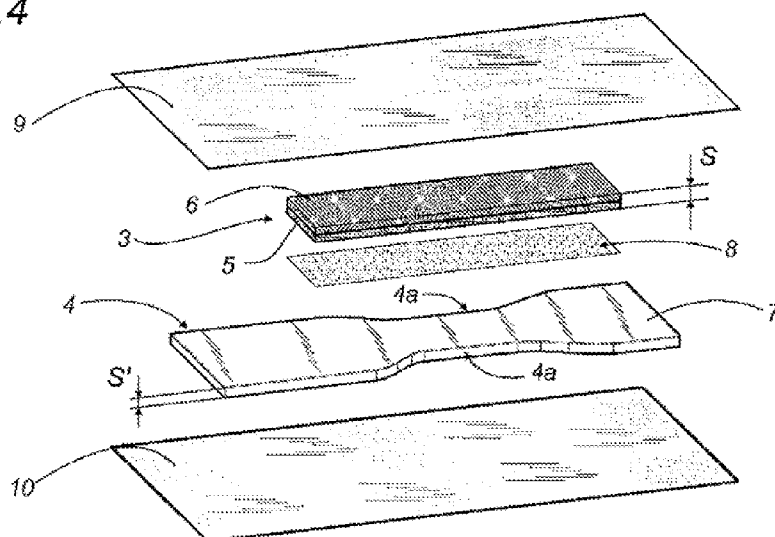


FIG.4



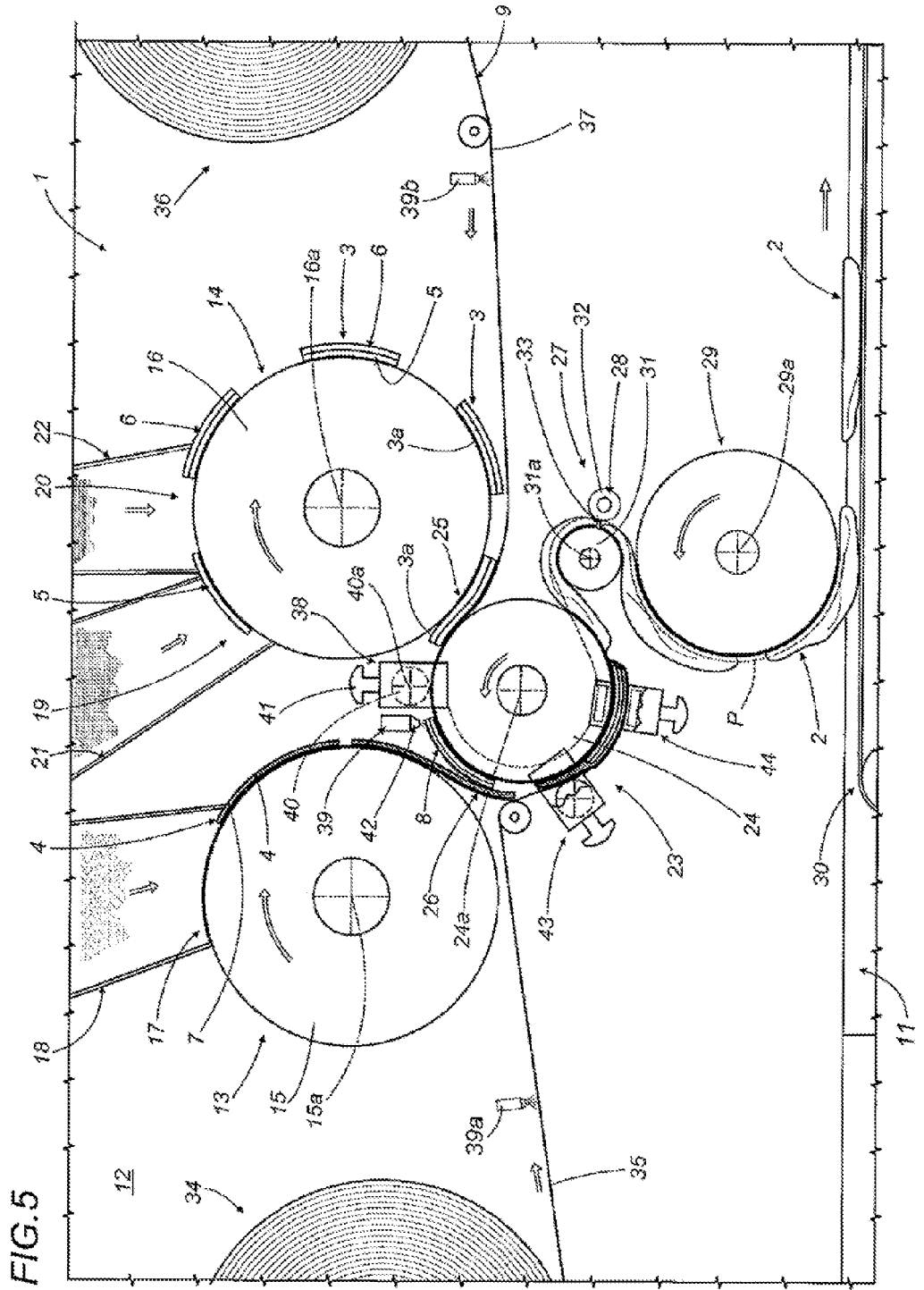


FIG. 5

METHOD AND UNIT FOR MAKING SECTIONS OF PADDING FOR ABSORBENT SANITARY ARTICLES

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] This invention relates to a method and a unit for making sections of padding for absorbent sanitary articles.

[0002] In particular, this invention relates to a method and a unit for making sections of padding for absorbent sanitary articles such as nappies for babies, incontinence pads for adults, sanitary towels and the like.

BACKGROUND ART

[0003] As is known, such articles are obtained by superposing a sheet of permeable material (non-woven fabric) on a sheet of impermeable material, and interposing between them a section of padding comprising an absorbent pad.

[0004] In recent years, to increase the absorbency of such products, manufacturers have made a section of padding consisting of at least two superposed pads having different shapes and dimensions.

[0005] In general, a first pad, or inner pad, which is substantially rectangular, is positioned on a second supporting pad, or outer pad, which is larger, having a substantially hourglass anatomical shape.

[0006] Usually, both pads are made from a mixture consisting of cellulose pulp (fluff) and granules of superabsorbent polymers (SAP). In order to increase drainage of the liquid absorbed and to increase the concentration of the superabsorbent polymer in a precise zone of the section of padding, the inner pad is made thicker than the supporting pad, by superposing two or more layers of absorbent material containing a large quantity of granular superabsorbent material (SAP).

[0007] In a prior art machine for making a section of padding of the above-mentioned type, there is a first suction drum for forming and conveying the multi-layer inner pad and a second suction drum for forming and conveying the outer supporting pad, which consists of a single layer of absorbent material.

[0008] The first and second drums are side by side and rotate in opposite directions about respective axes which are parallel with each other. The two drums are substantially at a tangent to one another at a station where the multi-layer inner pad, conveyed by the first drum, is placed on the outer pad, conveyed by the second drum.

[0009] Then, the two superposed pads are conveyed towards compressing means to complete the production of the absorbent section of padding.

[0010] It has been noticed that the absorbent section of padding, made according to the prior art described, may not be suitably stuck together and compact, despite the above-mentioned compressing operation, since the granules of superabsorbent material (SAP), present in a large quantity in the layers which make up the multi-layer inner pad, do not allow the fibres of the cellulose pulp (fluff) to stably interpenetrate one another.

[0011] A lack of cohesion between the layers which make up the multi-layer pad results in dispersion in the environment of the granules of superabsorbent material (SAP), which, over time, may cause incorrect operation or faults in the mechanical devices for forming the pads.

[0012] Moreover, in the prior art referred to the absorbent section of padding may be unevenly compressed, since the compression occurs on superposed pads with different thicknesses.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

[0013] The aim of this invention is to provide a unit for making sections of padding for absorbent sanitary articles which have greater cohesion and compactness, and a method for making such sections of padding.

[0014] The technical purpose indicated and the aims specified are achieved by a method and a unit comprising the features described in one or more of the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0015] Further features and advantages of this invention are more apparent in the non-limiting description which follows of a preferred, non-limiting embodiment of a unit, illustrated in the accompanying drawings, in which:

[0016] FIG. 1 is a schematic front view of a unit for making sections of padding for absorbent sanitary articles;

[0017] FIG. 2 is a scaled-up view of a detail from FIG. 1;

[0018] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of the section of padding made by the unit of FIG. 1;

[0019] FIG. 4 is an exploded view of the section of padding illustrated in FIG. 3; and

[0020] FIG. 5 illustrates an alternative embodiment, of the unit of FIG. 1.

[0021] With reference to FIG. 1, the numeral 1 denotes in its entirety a unit for making sections of padding 2 for absorbent sanitary articles.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

[0022] With reference to FIGS. 3 and 4, the section of padding 2 has a substantially rectangular shape, extending along an axis A, and comprises a first pad 3, hereinafter referred to more precisely as the inner pad 3, and a second pad, hereinafter referred to as the outer pad 4, both made of absorbent material, the pads being superposed.

[0023] The inner pad 3, thus named because in practice it faces towards the user, has smaller longitudinal and transversal dimensions than the outer pad.

[0024] In the example shown the inner pad 3 has the shape of a rectangle.

[0025] The outer pad 4, thus named because it is furthest from the user, supports the inner pad 3 and is laterally provided with two recesses 4a, symmetrical relative to the axis A, so that it has a substantially hourglass anatomical shape.

[0026] According to alternative embodiments not illustrated, the outer pad 4 is without the two recesses 4a.

[0027] The inner pad 3 of the section of padding 2 comprises at least one layer of absorbent material. In particular, according to the embodiment described, the inner pad 3 comprises two layers or panels 5 and 6 of absorbent material.

[0028] Preferably, the panel 5 and/or the panel 6 contain cellulose fibres (fluff) and/or granular superabsorbent material (SAP).

[0029] Similarly, the outer pad 4 comprises at least one panel or layer 7 of absorbent material. It should be noticed that, unlike the inner pad 3, in the example shown the outer pad 4 comprises a single layer 7 of absorbent material.

[0030] Preferably, the panel 7 also contains cellulose fibres (fluff) and/or granular superabsorbent material (SAP).

[0031] As described, the inner pad 3 has a thickness S which is greater than the thickness S' of the outer pad 4.

[0032] Interposed between the two pads 3 and 4 there may be a layer of adhesive substance, labelled 8.

[0033] The two pads 3 and 4 are enclosed between two sheets 9 and 10 of permeable or hydrophilic filter material, which are sealed together at their rectangular edges.

[0034] The unit 1 comprises a base 11 delimited at the front by a vertical wall 12, forming the support for a plurality of conveyors and transfer means which are mounted on axes transversal to the wall 12.

[0035] The unit 1 comprises a first rotary conveyor 13 for forming and feeding a continuous succession of the outer pads 4 of absorbent material and a second rotary conveyor 14 for forming and feeding a continuous succession of the inner pads 3, comprising two superposed layers 5 and 6 of absorbent material.

[0036] The conveyors 13 and 14 respectively comprise a first roller 15 and a second roller 16, both rotating clockwise (observing FIG. 1) about respective axes 15a and 16a which are parallel with each other and positioned in the same horizontal plane.

[0037] Above the first roller 15, in a zone 17 for forming the outer pad 4, there is a hopper 18 for feeding absorbent material comprising a mixture of cellulose fibres (fluff) and granules of superabsorbent material (SAP).

[0038] If, not illustrated, the outer pad 4 is a multi-layer pad, alongside the hopper 18 there is a further hopper similar to the hopper 18. The further hopper provided if necessary feeds absorbent material comprising cellulose fibres (fluff) and/or granules of superabsorbent material (SAP).

[0039] Above the second roller 16, in two zones, from left to right labelled 19 and 20 and for forming the two layers 5 and 6 of the inner pad 3, there are respective hoppers 21 and 22.

[0040] More precisely, the hopper 21 feeds absorbent material comprising cellulose fibres (fluff) for forming the layer 5, while the hopper 22 feeds a mixture of cellulose fibres (fluff) and granules of superabsorbent material (SAP) for forming the second layer 6.

[0041] The cylindrical surfaces of the roller 15 and the roller 16 are equipped with suction holders, not illustrated, spaced at equal angles, designed to receive and retain by suction respectively the outer pads 4 and the inner pads 3.

[0042] The numeral 23 denotes a third conveyor, comprising a third roller 24 rotating anti-clockwise about an axis 24a positioned below the axes 15a and 16a and equidistant from them.

[0043] The third roller 24 is substantially at a tangent to the second roller 16 at a position 25 for receiving the inner pads 3 and to the first roller 15 at a position 26 for receiving the outer pads 4 and for superposing the latter and the inner pads 3. With reference to the direction of rotation of the third roller 24, the receiving position 25 is located upstream of the receiving and superposing position 26.

[0044] The third roller 24 is part of the means, labelled 27 as a whole, for transferring the sections of padding 2 to a line, not illustrated, for making absorbent sanitary articles.

[0045] The transfer means 27 extend along a path P and comprise, in addition to the third roller 24, a cutting device 28, located, relative to the roller 24, in a position substantially

opposite the first roller 15, a spacer roller 29, rotating about an axis 29a, and a conveyor 30 for feeding to the line for making absorbent sanitary articles.

[0046] The cutting device 28 comprises a suction roller 31 rotating clockwise about an axis 31a and a roller 32 equipped with a blade 33 which operates in conjunction with the roller 31.

[0047] The numeral 34 denotes means for feeding a first continuous web 35 of permeable or hydrophilic filter material, on the cylindrical surface of the first roller 15, upstream of the zone 17 for forming the outer pad 4.

[0048] The numeral 36 denotes means for feeding a second continuous web 37 of permeable or hydrophilic filter material, on the cylindrical surface of the third roller 24, immediately upstream of the tangent zone 25 between the second roller 16 and the third roller 24.

[0049] In practice, during rotation of the first roller 15, at the hopper 18 outlet zone 17, the outer pads 4 are gradually formed one after another in the holders, not illustrated, on top of the web 35.

[0050] The roller 15 uses suction to retain the outer pads 4 and transfers them from the forming zone 17 towards the position 26.

[0051] Before receiving the outer pads 4 the web 5 is provided with an adhesive substance by a unit 39a for application of an adhesive.

[0052] Similarly, during rotation of the second roller 16, at the hopper 21 outlet zone 19, the layers 5 are gradually formed one after another, and at the second hopper 22 outlet zone 20 the second layers 6 of the inner pads 3 are gradually formed one after another on top of the layers 5.

[0053] The second roller 16 uses suction to retain the inner pads 3 and transfers them from the forming zone 20 towards the tangent position 25, where they are transferred onto the cylindrical surface of the third roller 24 with the second web 37 interposed between the pads and the third roller.

[0054] Before receiving the inner pads 3 the web 37 is provided with an adhesive substance by a unit 39b for application of an adhesive. According to an alternative embodiment not illustrated, the unit 39b for application of an adhesive is absent.

[0055] The third roller 24 transfers the pads 3 comprising two layers 5 and 6 from the position 25 to the position 26, through compressing means 38.

[0056] If the layer 8 of adhesive substance must be interposed between the pads 3 and 4, the pads 3 are subjected to the action of a unit 39c for application of an adhesive between the compressing means 38 and the position 26. According to another alternative embodiment not illustrated, the pads 4 are subjected to the action of a unit for application of an adhesive which is interposed between the hopper 18 and the position 26.

[0057] The compressing means 38 comprise a roller 40, idly rotating about an axis 40a parallel with the axis 24a and operating in conjunction with the third roller 24 so as to compress the two superposed layers 5 and 6 of absorbent material, in such a way as to compact them, reducing the thickness S of the inner pad 3.

[0058] There are pneumatic means 41 acting on the shaft of the roller 40 for varying the distance between the cylindrical surfaces of the rollers 40 and 24 and for applying, in that way, a compression force on the layers 5 and 6 of the inner pad 3.

[0059] At the superposing position **26**, the outer pad **4**, fed by the roller **15**, is superposed on the inner pad **3** comprising two layers **5** and **6**, fed by the roller **16**.

[0060] Downstream of the superposing position **26**, the two pads **3** and **4**, superposed and enclosed between the webs **35** and **37**, are transferred along the path **P**, through the second compressing means **43** and a sealing device **44**.

[0061] The second compressing means **43** are the same as the first compressing means **38** and simultaneously compress the two superposed pads **3** and **4** enclosed between the webs **35** and **37**.

[0062] Downstream of the second compressing means **43**, in the direction of rotation of the third roller **24**, the device **44** seals the two continuous webs **35** and **37** substantially along the entire border **47** of each outer pad **4** having the larger dimensions.

[0063] With reference to FIG. 2, at the outfeed of the roller **24**, the continuous succession of sections of padding **2**, labelled **48**, is divided into pieces by the cutting device **28**, to form the individual sections of padding **2**.

[0064] At the cutting device **28** outfeed, the spacer roller **29** picks up the individual sections of padding **2** and, according to a known method, places them spaced out by a predetermined step on the conveyor **30** which feeds the line for making absorbent sanitary articles, not illustrated.

[0065] It is evident from the above description how the various disadvantages, highlighted in the introduction with reference to the prior art, are eliminated according to this invention.

[0066] The operation compressing the multi-layer inner pad **3** eliminates the disadvantages caused by the dispersion of particles of superabsorbent material.

[0067] Moreover, said compression significantly reduces the thickness **S** of the inner pad **3** and together with the final compression of the two superposed pads **3** and **4**, results in improved compacting of the section of padding **2** and a reduction in its overall dimensions.

[0068] FIG. 5 shows an alternative embodiment of what is described above, according to which the web **35** is not wound around the roller **15**, but around a small return roller **42** located at the position **26**.

1) A method for making sections of padding for absorbent sanitary articles comprising the steps of: forming on a first conveyor a continuous succession of outer pads comprising at least one panel or layer of absorbent material; forming on a second conveyor a continuous succession of inner pads comprising at least one panel or layer of absorbent material; superposing each outer pad on an inner pad, in such a way as to make pads comprising multiple layers of absorbent material; feeding the pads comprising multiple layers using transfer means to a production line for absorbent sanitary articles, characterised in that it comprises a step of compression of the inner pads before the step of superposing them on the outer pads.

2) The method according to claim 1, characterised in that the inner pads comprise two or more superposed layers of absorbent material.

3) The method according to claim 1, characterised in that it comprises a second step of compression of the superposed pads.

4) The method according to claim 1, characterised in that the step of superposing the outer pads on the inner pads is carried out on a third rotary conveyor for receiving both the inner pads and the outer pads.

5) The method according to claim 1, characterised in that it comprises the steps of: feeding to the first rotary conveyor, upstream of a forming zone for the outer pad, a first continuous web of permeable or hydrophilic filter material; feeding to the third rotary conveyor, upstream of a receiving zone for the inner pads, a second continuous web of permeable or hydrophilic filter material; after superposing the outer pads on the inner pads, the pads being enclosed between the two continuous webs.

6) The method according to claim 1, characterised in that it comprises the step of sealing together the webs along the entire border of each outer pad, and the step of cutting into pieces the continuous webs, thus making individual sections of padding.

7) The method according to claim 1, characterised in that it comprises a step of applying a layer of adhesive substance to the inner pads and/or to the outer pads and/or to the first continuous web of permeable or hydrophilic filter material and/or to the second continuous web of permeable or hydrophilic filter material.

8) A unit for making sections of padding for absorbent sanitary articles comprising a first conveyor for feeding and forming a continuous succession of outer pads comprising at least one layer of absorbent material, a second conveyor for feeding and forming a continuous succession of inner pads comprising at least one layer of absorbent material, means for transferring the pads along a path comprising a position for superposing the outer pads and the inner pads to a production line for absorbent sanitary articles, characterised in that it comprises compressing means for the inner pads upstream of the superposing position.

9) The unit according to claim 8, characterised in that the inner pads comprise two or more superposed layers of absorbent material.

10) The unit according to claim 8, characterised in that it comprises second compressing means for the superposed pads downstream of the superposing position.

11) The unit according to claim 8, characterised in that the transfer means comprise a third rotary conveyor substantially tangent to the first rotary conveyor and the second rotary conveyor, the superposing position being defined by the tangent zone between the first conveyor and the third conveyor.

12) The unit according to claim 8, characterised in that it comprises means for feeding a first continuous web of permeable or hydrophilic filter material to the first conveyor upstream of a forming zone for the outer pad and means for feeding a second continuous web of permeable or hydrophilic filter material to the third conveyor upstream of the tangent zone between the third conveyor and the second conveyor; after superposing the outer pads on the inner pads, the pads being enclosed between the two continuous webs.

13) The unit according to claim 8, characterised in that it comprises means for applying an adhesive substance to the inner pads and/or to the outer pads and/or to the first continuous web of permeable or hydrophilic filter material and/or to the second continuous web of permeable or hydrophilic filter material.

14) The unit according to claim 8, characterised in that it comprises a device for sealing together the two continuous webs downstream of the superposing position.

15) The unit according to claim 8, characterised in that the transfer means comprise a device for cutting into pieces the continuous webs, thus making individual sections of padding.

16) The unit according to claim 8, characterised in that the transfer means comprise, interposed between the cutting device and the production line for absorbent sanitary articles, a spacer roller for the sections of padding.

17) The unit according to claim 8, characterised in that the compressing means for the inner pads, the second compressing means for the superposed pads and the sealing device operate in conjunction with the third conveyor, the means and the device facing the periphery of the third conveyor.

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